Miskin Kukla
Doğan Özdemir

Cover: ©Doğan Özdemir

This surreal piece wanders along the blurred edges between human and animal forms, merging the facial features of a person and a fish into a single being. Fragmented faces and multiplied eyes evoke a sense of duality questioning the fragile nature of perception and the layered structure of identity. The line between the visual world and inner reality dissolves into the murky waters of the subconscious. The deep connection between humans and nature is not merely a theme here, but an existential whisper embedded within the image itself.

Mental confusion, anxiety, and fear often push people beyond their instincts. Yet when a person touches their animal impulse, the response is the purest and most authentic. In this piece, traces of that inner transformation are visible. The hand at the bottom of the composition stands as a grounding force amid the chaos both a bearer of material weight and a dweller of the unconscious, holding the gravity of this fusion.

Fish: The Mind's Abyss

“Whispers of the Untamed" merges primal instincts with artificial constructs. This visionary artwork is composed of bones, wings, horns, and machines, forming a hybrid creature. At its core, an electric guitar, suspended by strings and flanked by horse heads, rises like a relic of cultural rebellion. This mechanical altar symbolizes the union of spirit and voice, bridging the gap between predator and prey, machine and mammal.

The absurd skull, with its teeth and claws, evokes ancestral memories, while wings tethered by strings represent freedom constrained by invisible forces. The drooping whiskers symbolize wisdom. The monochrome palette distorts realism, guiding the viewer into a symbolic realm. The piece questions whether nature and technology are adversaries or co-creators of identity.

Reflecting the modern human, the work illustrates the sacred yet fragmented nature of existence. The pedestal beneath signifies the endless potential of this fragmented totem. The geometric patterns on the floor, fading in perspective, represent the evolving values of culture. "Whispers of the Untamed" challenges us to consider what is lost when we suppress our instincts, what we gain when we electrify our myths, and what remains when the line between biology and design vanishes.

Whispers of the Untamed

"The Body's Scream" emerges as a visceral exploration of the human form's turbulent relationship with emotion and thought. The work encapsulates a deep-seated cry, where the boundaries between physicality and psychological turmoil dissolve. The broken limbs and distorted body evoke the struggle to express the often inexpressible. The out-stretched hands, reaching for something elusive, with the open mouth hanging in a silent scream, depict the tension between the desire to communicate and the limitations imposed by the body. The fragmented figure portrays a profound existential dilemma—the inability to fully reconcile mind and body. The background, with its muted tones, further intensifies the chaotic nature of the composition, evoking a turbulent inner landscape. With its raw and disturbing imagery, the artwork invites the viewer to confront their own inner disharmony and the invisible struggles we all face when expressing our inner worlds. The small fish fins emerging from the arms suggest an escape from chaos, like a fish finding its way out of roiling waters. But the futile end was already near...

The Body's Scream

This artwork creates a world where abstract images of the human body merge with death. The fragmented presentation of elements like the eye, arm, and leg invites the viewer to question the boundaries of the body and the mind. The skeletal figure, a reflection of death, survival, and existence beyond time, emphasizes a broken reality. The dystopian atmosphere of the piece is an expression of human desires and decaying dreams.

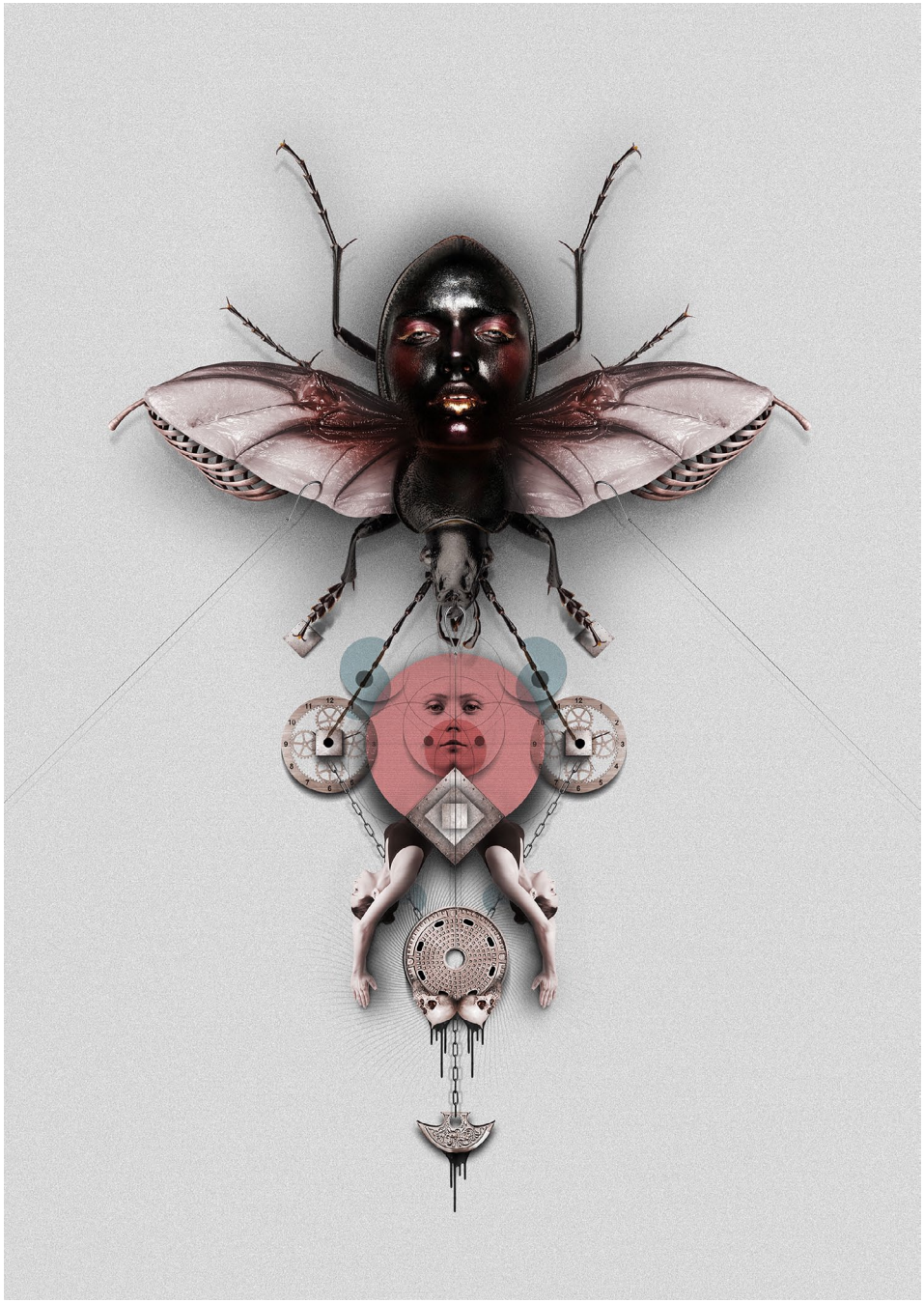
The Decaying Illusion

A nightmare stitched with the fabric of time, where pain echoes with every passing second. A bug's body, adorned with the black face of a woman, challenges the very essence of life. Beneath its antennae, clock-work mechanisms twist in endless motion, as if trapped in a universe where time never stops. Under its wings, a ribcage symbolizes the fragility of survival, while a pink circle above represents fleeting moments of peace — yet beneath it lies a cold truth.

The white face of a woman rests on this circle, serenely traveling through time, but her stillness feels like a trap — as if caught in the web of time's cruel game. Two women dangle below, their hands clasped in reverence for time. One, head bowed, accepts the inevitable embrace of death, while the other, bound by chains, stands on the edge of her final moment. Time is shackled, pulling them toward a painful end. The chains must break — or the threads binding the wings to life must snap. Only then will we know if there's a way to stop the inevitable.

On one side, death waits; on the other, time relentlessly ticks forward. Will this endless cycle ever cease, or will it continue forever? Perhaps, to break free, the chains must shatter — or this dark fate will remain unchallenged.

The Ensnared Souls of Time



This piece delves into the darker corners of the human soul and internal chaos through the concept of a mask. The eye at the center represents not just awareness, but a structure where thoughts, emotions, and identities intertwine like a mask. Inside the eye, the wires, beard, and hands forming a skull emphasize the decay, fragility, and loss within the inner world of the being. This mask is not merely a cover, but a structure that carries the weight of existence, representing the tangled knots of the mind. The hands seem to struggle to break free from the strings, symbolizing the fight for existence amidst captivity. The horns and eye reflect the powerful force behind this structure—an internal control or pressure. This creature, a fusion of mask and existence, invites the viewer to feel deep empathy for the identity crisis and internal entrapment we all face. In this delicate line between mental chaos and identity loss, every movement feels like another knot tightening. The piece confronts the viewer with both the external mask and the inner truth hidden beneath.

The Mind's Tangle

This thought-provoking piece delves into the intricate relationship between the human mind and technology. The fusion of a kitchen appliance with a human face symbolizes the mechanization of individuals in modern life, reflecting how personal thoughts evolve in response to an increasingly robotic world. The propellers adorning the head represent the man's desperate attempts to cool his overwhelmed mind, as he struggles to find respite amidst the mental chaos. His face, seamlessly merged with the mixer, emphasizes the overwhelming confusion he faces in a world where the lines between human essence and mechanization blur.

The choice of textures and color palette is deliberate in this surreal depiction. The dark tones surrounding the subject evoke a sense of coldness and alienation, mirroring the chilling influence of technology on the human spirit. These stark hues also symbolize the growing distance between the individual and their own freedom. The scattered freckles on the face symbolize fragments of individuality and identity, slowly being lost to the mechanical process.

The blurred, hazy background reinforces the surreal atmosphere, representing the fluidity of thought and the overwhelming flood of stimuli that disrupts clarity. As a surrealist piece, it transcends literal interpretation to highlight the psychological struggle of balancing inner turmoil with an external, robotic world. This is a powerful commentary on the disintegration of personal autonomy in the face of technological advancement, urging us to reflect on the cost of becoming increasingly mechanized in a world that demands conformity.

Mental Gears: The Mechanization of Thought

This artwork symbolizes the internal conflict of a soul journeying towards transcendence. The large hand, meant to guide the figure from solitude to freedom, acts more as a force of pressure than protection, holding the figure in its grasp. Rather than a comforting force, it is a reminder of the weight the figure bears as it struggles towards a sense of belonging.

The body, bare and adorned with wings, represents both freedom and the yearning for release. Yet the fear in her face reveals the price of that freedom — a profound sense of lostness and vulnerability. The soft frame surrounding her offers a sense of calm, but this serenity only contrasts with the fear and isolation that pierce her expression. Behind her, the peaceful background feels like a promise of escape, but it's clear that the figure cannot find her way out. She is trapped in a world where the illusion of peace battles the truth of her internal chaos.

Each flap of her wings seems to promise a step toward freedom, but under the heavy weight of that large hand, the fear remains, turning her flight into a cry for salvation rather than liberation. The balance between freedom, existence, and belonging is fragile, as the figure's struggle echoes the universal fight within the human spirit: to awaken while fearing what may come.

In the Wings of Fear and Awakening

In this piece, the human face and Doberman are bound by a silent, unspoken bond. The dark texture of the face melds seamlessly with the black fur of the dog, symbolizing an inseparable connection between human and animal. The Doberman's amber eyes, staring into the distance, reflect an inner turmoil that parallels the quiet struggle of the mind beneath. Its stillness represents not peace, but a tense vigilance, as though waiting for a revelation to break through the silence.

The human face, frozen in thought, is a mask for the emotions and desires lurking beneath. It is a symbol of restraint, yet the Doberman's gaze reveals the depth of unspoken loyalty and trust. The connection between them is not forged by words but through an understanding that transcends the need for verbal expression. The black skin of the human and the dog's fur mirror one another, emphasizing their shared experience—both carry the weight of something unacknowledged but deeply felt.

This composition challenges us to reflect on the nature of loyalty. The Doberman is not just a companion; it is a mental extension of the human figure, bound by both trust and inner conflict. The piece suggests that our deepest relationships are often those that form not in the spoken word but in the silent understanding that shapes our inner strength and emotional power.

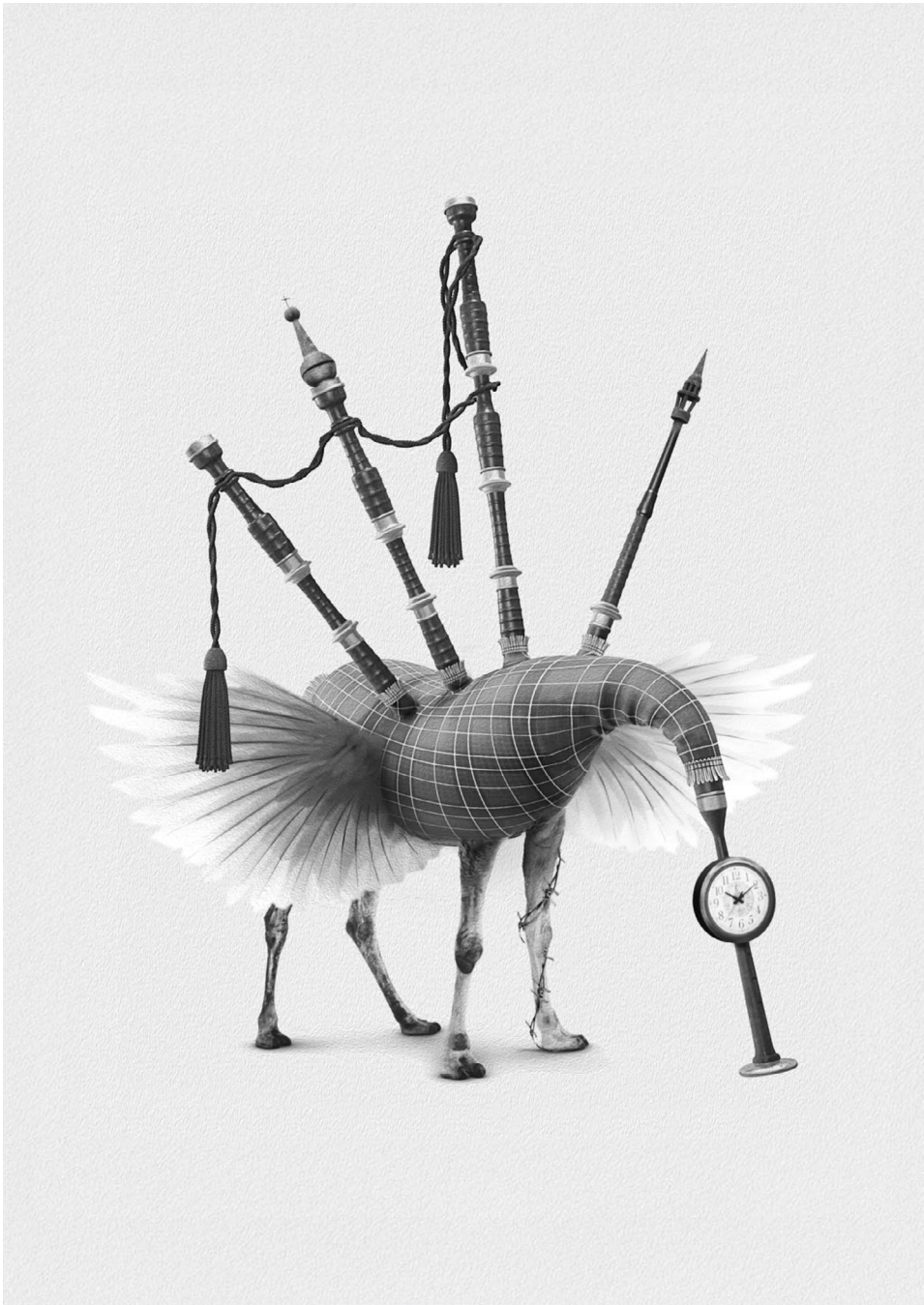
Beneath the Veil of Shadows

Ah, come closer, my friend, and let me tell you a twisted tale of time. Here, the music isn’t just any melody—flutes and tunes swirl through the air, and the world spins in every direction. Picture this: an old bird, but not just any bird! No, this one’s body is woven from bagpipes, playing the soulful tunes of Scotland's heart. Its wings, like the chanter, beat with the rhythm of life, and its feathers hum with the pulse of time, feeling each passing second.

Caught between the ticking of life and the ticking of a clock, this creature stumbles like a drunken soul. One leg wrapped in thorns, just a step away from freedom, yet, like all of us, weighed down by moments we cannot escape. The bagpipes play softly and chillingly, reminding us that time slips away, no matter how we try. The clock, lying on the ground, ticks like a ghost—an echo of what will eventually be lost.

But here's the twist, lad: the bird’s head. A barometer, measuring the pressure of life. What does it measure? Life itself? The weight of each breath? Or is it the weight of time pushing us forward? The wings flutter—perhaps to escape, perhaps to rise. Time presses on, but can we escape its grip?

The Distorted Sound of Time



In a universe where logic has gone on vacation, these creatures are running the show. A winged elephant? Naturally, why should birds have all the fun? Those giant eyes? They seem to see everything — except common sense. And a tree growing from its head? Maybe it's a new, undiscovered fashion trend. Who's to say? Meanwhile, these strange beings float around in a glass dome as if it's the latest craze. Evolution? Forget it. Why bother when you can sprout wings, grow trees, and wear eyes as accessories? The dome seems to be the only thing preventing this madness from spilling over into our world. But these creatures? They're perfectly calm. They're so zen that even their chaos looks organized. Perhaps they're the only ones who truly understand the absurdity of it all—and that's perfectly fine. After all, they're ahead of the curve. They're not bound by the rules of reality; they create their own. And as for us? We're stuck trying to make sense of a world that was never meant to make sense in the first place. They live in a world where nothing is as it seems—and it's the most peaceful place you could imagine. Who's laughing now? Probably them, because they definitely didn't read the manual. And as for us? Well, we're still trying to figure it out, one winged elephant at a time...

Nothing Is What It Seems

Artist Interview - Doğan Özdemir

Welcome, Doğan. You are *Dek Unu's* first artist from Türkiye. Please translate and explain your title, *Miskin Kukla.*

Miskin Kukla roughly translates to "lazy puppet" in English. It's an intentionally contradictory name. A puppet, by definition, is a figure that can move in any way—easily adaptable to place, time, or emotion. But Miskin Kukla is different. It only moves when it feels like it. Sometimes, it just thinks. From the outside, it can seem sluggish or indifferent.

Doğan Özdemir

This contradiction became central to the project—a surreal, expanding universe shaped by characters and environments that behave in unexpected ways. Over time, the project evolved into a form that often moves against what is expected of it. Its essence is rooted in the tension between control and rebellion, responsiveness and passivity.

Most of the time, the focus is a living entity—human, animal, plant, or cosmic. Surrounding these are supporting elements, often objects, which can border on the absurd. The goal is to

communicate not through realism, but through poetic imbalance —an ongoing visual narrative that defies neat interpretation.

Even North Americans who have visited know very little about Türkiye. Where do you live? What's life like there for you?

I was born and raised in Türkiye, but especially in the digital age, for an artist, the boundaries of space have become increasingly flexible, and my artistic production now operates on a global scale. Türkiye offers great potential for creativity with its rich cultural heritage and dynamic young population. However, challenges remain, such as limited financial support, infrastructural gaps, and the lack of societal appreciation for art. In recent years, living in Türkiye feels like stepping inside a surreal painting; the boundaries between reality and imagination have blurred so much that it's often hard to tell one from the other. This chaotic and absurd atmosphere both inspires and challenges my artistic production, because sometimes real life is even more fantastical than the wildest dreams.

Life as a citizen here is shaped by rapidly changing economic and social conditions; sometimes this fuels my creative motivation, other times it proves challenging. Particularly for independent artists, limited institutional support is a major hurdle. Nevertheless, Türkiye's diversity and cultural interactions provide a powerful source for creating original and profound expressions in my work. Living and creating in this environment brings difficulties, yet I strive to find my own voice and artistic language. Believing in the transcendent power of art, I reflect both the inspiration and the struggles this land offers in my work.

What is your origin story? Share bio details from your youth?

I've had a strong interest in drawing and visual creation since the age of four or five. I attended kindergarten in Tavas, a small and quiet town in the Denizli province. When I was six,

a teacher with an art education background advised my family that I should stay an extra year for further artistic development. That year left a surreal imprint on my memory — almost like an early, dreamlike art education experience. I was also deeply influenced by my older sister, whose passion for art shaped and encouraged my own path. While most people around me viewed art as a hobby or luxury, I always saw it as a core element of my being.

What kind of student were you? Studious high achiever? Mischief maker? Teacher's favorite? Teacher's headache?

Looking back at my pre-university days, I have to admit I wasn't exactly a star student. The curriculum was pretty dull and often killed my enthusiasm for classes. But I did shine when it came to sports, music, and drawing — fun fact: I apparently sneaked some math into my artwork without realizing! Studying hard? Not my thing. Back then, the system and rules didn't exactly excite me. I highly doubt I was anyone's teacher's pet—in fact, I was probably the troublemaker on their radar!

Describe the step up to university-level study. Better?

Things became clearer when I was accepted into the Graphic Design Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir. I failed two years in a row, largely due to communication issues with a professor from the U.S., but I stayed firm in defending my values and creative perspective. I was fully aware that being an artist in Türkiye could come with serious financial challenges, so becoming a "professional artist" felt like a distant, privileged goal. At the time, advertising seemed more realistic — a creative field that still allowed room for expression. Unfortunately, most of my teachers lacked real-world knowledge of the advertising industry. Only one of them truly understood how an ad agency

operated, which made it hard for me to find support or direction in that area. I think I've known from the very beginning that I would be an artist. However, I always believed that the time had to come in its own due course—that this path requires patience and perseverance. This mindset still holds true and keeps me motivated.

How does your training in the other media affect your photography?

I consider my foundational art education to be thorough and solid. My visual training has been ongoing since childhood, guided by constant experimentation and exploration that fuel

Fragmented Sounds, 2017

my growth. I am particularly interested in light, shadow, space, and depth. I don't like to treat photography in isolation; I enjoy combining images to alter their meanings, creating contrasts, and reinterpreting photography with surreal narratives. While the image captured by the lens is fixed, behind the story there is always a well-crafted photo collage simmering inside me.

Where do good ideas come from? What triggers your creativity?

My creativity is entirely spontaneous; ideas can come at any moment of the day. I usually jot them down. When an idea

matures, I take action, but sometimes when I sit at the computer, the idea shapes itself and transforms into a completely different story. I don't interfere too much with the process; I let it flow. I avoid imposing strict rules on the imagery I create because improvisation often leads to very different and unexpected ideas. Emotional intensity, anger, calmness, and energy levels all influence my creative process. The common thread in all these is a surreal narrative style.

When I think of a project as a series, I usually set a general timeframe for its completion. However, I don't follow a strict daily or hourly work schedule. Creativity has its ups and downs; sometimes I produce nothing at all, other times I dive into intense bursts of work. For me, forcing or conditioning creativity doesn't work well. Art is about an internal flow and freedom, so I prefer to surrender myself to that flow. Creativity depends on sincerity, and trying to force it is not really my style.

Creativity invites failures. How do you react when a piece just won't work? How do you overcome a "block?"

I have a very disciplined and critical approach to my work. I sometimes completely delete pieces that I feel negatively impact my visual quality, so they don't leave a bad impression in my memory. Rather than revisiting unsuccessful works, I prefer to start fresh. AAs a result, I have only a limited number of photographs that fully represent me. This attitude is a natural part of my continuous process of growth and renewal.

Of course, everyone experiences creative blocks from time to time. But when I find myself in a period of stagnation or mental blockage, I've come to recognize it as a time of inner development and conceptual refinement. This awareness helps me avoid panic during such phases. For me, creative block

often feels like a quiet transition — a moment when familiar patterns begin to dissolve and prepare for transformation. Over time, I've learned to better understand my thoughts. During these moments, I usually refresh my mind by listening to music or engaging with a completely different artistic discipline. Giving myself space and learning to be patient has been incredibly helpful in reigniting my creativity.

Given the limits of money, time, and influence, do you see your work as a competition with other artists?

Rather than competing with other artists, I value observing and understanding their work while deepening my own approach. I see art not as a competition, but as a personal and unique inner journey. I believe every artist has their own voice and timing. That's why I prefer to move forward not with a sense of rivalry, but with a motivation to understand myself better and evolve. Each artist operates under different circumstances—their position, economic conditions, and the realities of their geographic context all shape their path in unique ways.

What would be on the gallery's wall text to describe themes and background to a show of your artworks?

Looking at my work from the outside is challenging, but there are recurring core themes I keep returning to: the fine line between identity and transformation, fragility and resilience, the grotesque and the tender. I explore moments where the boundaries between digital and physical worlds blur. My characters often emerge as figures where these contrasts coexist, creating a sense that is both familiar and strange.

Dunbar Cemetery, Edinburgh 2021

Geographically, my artistic influences include Spain, the Nordic countries, and especially Edinburgh in the United Kingdom. In 2020, I briefly lived in Edinburgh with my wife and young daughter. The climate and social energy of Spain feel culturally close to us in Türkiye, while the introspective, mysterious atmosphere of Northern Europe and Edinburgh resonates with the contrasting, curious parts of my perspective. I often find it exciting to merge Mediterranean and Northern influences — or Asian and North American visual languages — in the same work. These kinds of cultural tensions have become a recurring and essential element of my work.

Visually, I use collage and layering techniques as both an aesthetic and conceptual way to reflect the fragmented nature of memory, nostalgia, and displacement. Humor and absurdity are not escapes from meaning but tools I use to deepen it and invite viewers into reflection. The fusion of human and animal forms is my way of blurring the line between identity and nature. These figures embody the primal, instinctual sides of humans alongside social and cultural layers. The resulting works are an inner exploration of humanity's complex, multi-layered, and sometimes contradictory nature.

How have you seen your art change over time? What evolutions do you see recently compared to your earlier work?

In my *Miskin Kukla* projects, I believe I will always keep experimenting and searching. Adding the warmth of the hand —something tactile and personal—to photography has become an essential aspect of my practice. In other projects, I'm sure I'll continue exploring the new possibilities offered by the digital world. Writing also seems to be slowly merging into the visual narrative. I prefer to let this evolution unfold naturally. I see the development of my work as a process shaped by this organic flow.

Do you remember your first "successful" photo?

If I remember correctly, I took my first photo in the mid-1990s with my friend's Zenit 11 camera. I used black-and-white film, and in those photos, I realized my mistaken belief that black and white hides flaws. It was there that I learned that light and shadow actually have many tones.

Were you an early adopter of digital photography or reluctant to change?

While I was at university, around 2001 or 2002, I had the opportunity to take a few test shots with my classmate from the

graphic design department's Mustek GSmart mini 2 digital camera. That moment was truly impactful for me and further deepened my interest in photography.

Are you 100% digital in your practice today or do you still find uses for film?

In my world, the line between analog and digital dissolves like mist. Photographs aren't mere frozen moments — they are living fragments, constantly unraveled, reassembled, reborn. Analog was a dance with light and shadow in the tangible world — cutting, pasting, layering — each imperfection pulsing like a heartbeat. Today, digital tools extend my fingertips into infinite realms, bending pixels like malleable clay. Time rushes, but creativity is boundless. Whether ink-stained or pixel-lit, each image is raw potential — a puzzle I endlessly remix, seeking new whispers beneath familiar surfaces.

For many contemporaries, "finished" means "posted." What role do the galleries play in your plan.

I haven't participated in a physical exhibition so far. But that doesn't mean my work hasn't been "exhibited." My pieces often circulate in digital spaces and find their way to different viewers. Perhaps the most meaningful "exhibition" for me is the one that unfolds in someone's imagination while they're alone in front of a screen. I value resonance in the mind more than presence in a gallery. Of course, I hope to be part of physical exhibitions in the future — but until then, my works continue to drift freely in the digital realm.

When it works best, how do viewers connect with your work?

The connection I want to create between my work and people is like opening a door that takes them beyond the ordinary.

Surreal expression leads the viewer on a journey through the labyrinths of their own subconscious. Everyone finds different meanings and feelings in their own dream world; my work simply accompanies that journey. Like falling upward and flying downward...

Thanks, Doğan. What's next? In there a dream project?

In the future, I aim to create rich intercultural projects that blend Turkish culture and motifs with those of Europe, America, and East Asia, using both poetic and surreal expressions. Through my art, I want to contribute to the places where I live or will live, helping to deepen people's awareness and perspectives. My greatest desire is to nourish and evolve my art by realizing these projects across different geographies.

Links

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